

In These Pages

by James Kurth

The current foreign-policy focus of most Americans is upon the Middle East and more broadly upon the Muslim world. Given the ongoing war in Iraq and the continuing threat from Islamic terrorism, this is understandably so. However, the region with the most dynamic growth today—and with the greater potential weight in world politics in the future—is East Asia. And the most dynamic and weighty country in that region is China.

The extraordinary growth of the Chinese economy is generating waves which have already reached other economies at the farthest ends of the earth. In a way reminiscent of the British economy in the nineteenth century and America's in the twentieth, China in the twenty-first century has become "the workshop of the world," the core of the global manufacturing sector. In doing so, it has hollowed out and flattened the economies of dozens of once-developing countries and little workshops around the world. China is now also rapidly expanding its workforce in the engineering and information technology industries. Like America during much of the twentieth cen-

tury, China is driving toward becoming the office complex of the world, the core of the global information sector, as well, in doing so, it may hollow out America itself.

Historically, the rapid growth of the economy of a great country has often issued in enormous—and disruptive—changes in that country's domestic politics, in its foreign policies, and in its military power. This, in turn, has produced realignments in regional politics and eventually in world politics—most obviously, with the rapid rise of German, American, and even Russian economic power a century ago. The rise of German power forced the hegemonic global power of the day, Britain, into new alliances that represented radical departures from traditional British foreign policy. The rise of American power provided a new candidate to take Britain's place in the role of global hegemon. And the rise of Russia, which by the early 1910s was progressing even faster than that of Germany, propelled the latter country toward a grand strategy of preventive war, a path that ultimately ended in the First World War. That war brought tremendous disruptions to Germany's economy and deva-

stated Russia's, but it propelled the American economy to even greater heights. Later, the rapid recovery and expansion of the German economy in the 1930s enabled and also propelled (because of Germany's lack of industrial raw materials) the Nazi territorial aggressions that led to the Second World War. Similarly, the rapid recovery and expansion of the Soviet economy in the 1950s enabled and encouraged the confrontational Soviet policies that led to some of the most dangerous times of the Cold War, culminating in the Cuban missile crisis of 1962.

Of course, the leading policymakers of the leading powers know this dismal history, and presumably they have drawn lessons from it. For this reason, and for others as well, China's rising economy and power do not have to end in some kind of third world war or a new kind of cold war. But it is almost certain to usher in enormous—and disruptive—changes in China's domestic politics and its relations with the other nations of East Asia, and in these nations' relations and even realignments with each other.

This issue of *Orbis* focuses upon the new alignments and realignments, both domestic and international, in East Asia. Our articles discuss what is happening in China and also in Taiwan, Japan, and South Korea.

The Chinese Communist Party has dominated the extraordinary history of China for more than five decades, and it has led China's extraordinary economic growth over the last two decades. But, as

Cheng Li, a Chinese scholar now teaching in America, argues in his article, the CCP is now undergoing its own transformation, with the beginnings of a division not just into two conventional factions based upon personal cliques, but into two competing alliances of different social and economic interests. If this process continues and is institutionalized, the course of Chinese party politics in the future will bear some similarities to the course of party politics in some Western countries in the past, particularly during the nineteenth century.

Domestic political changes and conflicts usually produce changes in foreign policy, and this will happen with China. The most important changes will be in China's policy toward the United States. Peter Hays Gries gives an informed and revealing account of how China's leading foreign-policy intellectuals and analysts now think about the United States and about the agitated topic of hegemony in global politics.

The most dangerous point of conflict between an expanding China and a hegemonic United States is, of course, Taiwan. China's domestic politics will shape this issue, but so will Taiwan's. As small as it is, Taiwan could be the Archimedian lever that could one day move, or rather shake, the world. Shelley Rigger, one of America's premier scholars of Taiwanese politics, gives a thorough analysis of the connection between Taiwan's party politics and its "external relations" (which encompasses both cross-strait relations with China and its relations with other nations).

She shows that despite the dramatic and heated rhetoric characteristic of party politics in Taiwan, there is a persistent structure and remarkable stability to its external relations.

In a contrasting dynamic, Japan in the last decade has undergone great changes in both its party system and its government structure (e.g., the increased role of the prime minister in policymaking). The long-standing “system of ’55”—the hegemonic dominance of the Liberal Democratic Party after 1955—collapsed in the early 1990s. Robert Pekkanen and Ellis Krauss provide an insightful analysis of these changes and their important consequences for Japan’s security policies—both foreign policy and internal security. The most important consequence is an even closer alliance with the United States. This includes support of the U.S. war in Iraq and also a closer alignment with U.S. policy with respect to Taiwan.

We are thus in a period when relations among Japan, China, and Taiwan have assumed a character that is more complex than it was in the several decades before. Tomohiko Taniguchi, a prominent Japanese policy analyst, helps us to interpret this new pattern, which he terms a “cold peace.” The pattern is distinguished by the odd conjunction of both rapidly expanding Japanese-Chinese economic cooperation and seriously deteriorating political attitudes between these nations. Japan has arrived at a similarly complex relationship with South Korea. On the one hand, the two countries’ economic and even cultural relations

are closer and more cooperative than at any time in their troubled history during the twentieth century. On the other hand, Korea’s memory of Japan’s occupation and conduct from 1910 to 1945 still ignites political demonstrations against Japan and disrupts relations between the two nations. Michael Auslin discusses the connections between these two countries, which he terms “the new East Asian core.”

Our ensemble of articles on East Asia concludes with a review essay by Bruce Cumings, one of America’s leading historians of twentieth-century Northeast Asia. He discusses several new books which try to discern the direction of twenty-first century China. America did not have a very good record of understanding and predicting China’s behavior in the twentieth century. That failure was one origin of the Korean and Vietnam wars. Cumings is skeptical of the ability of the American authors whom he reviews to understand and predict the China of the future. He invites us, rather, to try to understand China as the best of that country’s scholars do. America is now dealing with what is simultaneously the oldest civilization, the most populous country, the most dynamic economy, and potentially the most weighty country in the world, and we can’t afford to get it wrong again.

This issue of *Orbis* also includes articles on two other regions, Europe and Africa. The center of dynamic growth and power politics a century ago, Europe is hardly that today. There is, however, one part of Europe that is experien-

cing dynamic growth in numbers and political importance: its Muslim population. Zachary Shore depicts the current conflicts between the growing community of ethnic Muslims and the declining society of ethnic Europeans, and he proposes possible ways to resolve them.

Frederic Pryor addresses a different current tension, that between East Germans, the former citizens of a Marxist state and socialist society, and the Germany of today, a thoroughly liberal state and individualist society. As Pryor shows, East Germans appreciate some of what they have gained, but they also regret much of what they have lost; the result is a Germany that remains rather less united in fact and in spirit than it does in form and in law. The law and spirit of the contemporary liberal German state is examined in further detail by Paul Gottfried in his review essay. Germany today is the complete opposite of Germany at the beginning of the twentieth century, and most people will think that this is a good thing. But one of the reasons for this transformation, indeed revolution, is that the liberal German establishment has worked so hard to suppress any residue of the German past that it has obliterated any real German national identity. In the process, it has instituted a new sort of political authoritarianism—one that is, however, liberal in name.

In contrast to East Asia and Europe, it might be thought that Africa has never been a center of dynamic growth and power politics,

neither today nor in the past. This is not really the case, however. Godfrey Uzoigwe, a Nigerian scholar teaching in America, presents a sweeping overview of African history from the beginning of the Islamic conquests to the end of European colonialism, depicting the rise and fall of economies and empires, of wealth and power. Africa was the home of formidable indigenous empires and the foundation for several European ones. But now, after more than four decades of independence for most of Africa's some forty states, there is no sign of dynamic growth. There is, however, plenty of evidence of squalid abuse of power. Herbert Werlin depicts the extent of corruption in Africa and offers proposals for its correction. Until this debilitating social disease is cured or contained, all the current projects to increase foreign aid to Africa will come to naught.

In the meantime, Americans are quite properly continuing to concern themselves with the ongoing war in Iraq. Glenn Kutler provides a retrospective of the first two years of that war, with a particular focus upon the U.S. military fatalities there. He discerns that there was a regular, cyclical pattern to these fatalities. He also argues that they had already affected voting behavior in the 2004 presidential election, reducing the votes for George Bush in the home counties of the soldiers killed. If the war and U.S. fatalities continue into the 2006 and 2008 elections, it can be expected that they will impose a serious electoral cost upon the Republican Party.

Hegemonic global powers do seem to have a propensity for submerging themselves in dubious and fruitless little wars in faraway lands; it goes with the territory, so to speak. A century ago, Britain was preoccupied with the Boer War and its aftermath. British governments believed they were bringing liberalism to South Africa, much as the Bush administration believes that it is bringing democracy to Iraq. They also believed that the gold mines of the Transvaal were crucial to the global economy of the time, much as the Bush administration believes that the oil fields of the Persian Gulf are crucial to today's global economy. A century later, however, we know that the real and fundamental task before Britain in the 1900s was to somehow manage the rapid rise of German economic and military power. The Boer War was at best a distraction and a diversion from this, and in fact it even aggravated tensions between Britain and Germany. In the end, Britain failed to rise to its great task, and the First World War was the result.

How will the war be viewed a century from now, in relation to the real and fundamental tasks before the United States in the 2000s? Certainly, Islamic terrorism poses a grave challenge to the United States, but by now the war seems to be more part of the problem than part of the solution. In this issue of *Orbis*, however, we have focused upon the tasks presented by the rapid rise of Chinese economic power and the likely rise in the future of Chinese military power. The Iraq War seems to be at best a distraction and a diversion from this, although it does not appear to have aggravated tensions between the United States and China. Perhaps the real danger of the war—U.S. military fatalities and all—is that it will create an Iraq syndrome that, like the Vietnam syndrome of the 1970s, will cause the American people to withdraw from an active, coherent, and sustained foreign policy. If so, among the fatalities in the war will be any future U.S. policy toward China and East Asia.